

The University of Chicago

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EARLY
PERSONAL HISTORY FOR CER-
TAIN PERSONALITY TRAITS

A PART OF THE DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
GRADUATE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

By
CHARLES KILORD ATHEN WANG

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EARLY PERSONAL HISTORY FOR CERTAIN PERSONALITY TRAITS

By CHARLES K. A. WANG, University of Chicago

The purpose of this investigation is to make an exploratory study of the significance of selected items of fact in one's early personal history for certain of his personality traits.¹ It is an attempt to answer the question, "What facts in a person's early life are significant in the formation of some of his personality traits?" In doing so, we are interested not so much in individual cases as in the group differences of the various personality classifications.

For information on early personal history a special questionnaire was prepared. No attempt was made to have it exhaustive; care was taken, however, to include principally items which could be answered with a minimum of subjective judgment.

For information regarding the personality traits, the following tests were used: (1) Allport's Ascendancy-Submission Test;² (2) Freyd's Test of Introversion-Extraversion;³ (3) Moss's Test of Social Intelligence;⁴ (4) Pressey's X-O Test of Emotionality;⁵ and (5) Otis's Test of Suggestibility.⁶

Nearly 600 undergraduate students in the University of Chicago provided data. After eliminating those whose records were incomplete and those over 25 yr. of age, a total of 358 cases, 203 men and 155 women, remained which were used as the basis of this study.

The Otis test of suggestibility was given to the Ss during one of their class periods. The other tests, together with the personal history questionnaire, were permitted to be filled out at home without supervision, and returned later.

Personality traits. For the sake of economy of space, the distributions of raw scores on the 5 personality tests are not here presented. It was found, however, that in most cases our central tendencies differed considerably from those given by the respective authors for comparable groups, *i.e.* for college students. Table I gives a comparison of the median scores for our Ss and those given by the respective authors.

*Accepted for publication July 1, 1931.

¹This paper is abbreviated from a doctoral dissertation which is on file, under similar title, in the University of Chicago Library. For a copy of the questionnaire used in this study and for a detailed presentation of the data, the reader is referred to the thesis which may be borrowed under the usual courtesies of library exchange. The writer is indebted to Professor F. A. Kingsbury for suggesting the problem and for advice and criticism during the progress of the study.

²G. W. Allport, A test for ascendancy-submission, *J. Abn. & Soc. Psychol.*, 23, 1928, 118-136.

³M. Freyd, Introverts and extroverts, *Psychol. Rev.*, 31, 1924, 74-87.

⁴F. A. Moss and T. Hunt, Ability to get along with others, *Indust. Psychol.*, 1, 1926, 170-178.

⁵S. L. Pressey and O. R. Chambers, First revision of a group scale designed for investigating the emotions, with tentative norms, *J. Appl. Psychol.*, 4, 1920, 97-102.

⁶M. Otis, A study of suggestibility of children. *Arch. Psychol.*, 11, 1924, (no. 70), 67-93.

It is not easy to explain all the discrepancies between our group and those of the different authors. In the cases of the ascendance-submission and introversion-extraversion tests, the differences are not so notable. On Pressey's test of emotionality, where the discrepancy is the greatest, it may perhaps be explained in several ways: first, Pressey's norms were obtained about 10 years before ours, and social attitudes about what is right and wrong, pleasant and unpleasant, may have changed sufficiently to affect the scores on his test; secondly, Pressey's group was presumably from smaller cities and rural districts, whereas

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF MEDIAN SCORES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS ON FIVE PERSONALITY TESTS

Test	This Study		Authors' Norms	
	No. Ss	Median	No. Ss	Median
Allport A-S	(men)	203	—	0.55
	(women)	155	120	15.40
	(total)	358	847	
Freyd I-E*	(men)	203	100	—11.41
	(women)	155	100	—11.12
	(total)	358		
Pressey X-O	(men)	203	56	
	(women)	155	58	
	(total)	358	114	230
Moss Soc. Int.	(men)	203		109
	(women)	155		115
	(total)	358	1217	111
Otis Sug.	(men)	203		
	(women)	155		
	(total)	358	83	83.26

*For comparison see E. Heidbreder, *Measuring introversion and extraversion*, *J. Abn. & Soc. Psychol.*, 21, 1926, 120-138.

ours are preponderantly of urban background; thirdly, Pressey's norms were based on only 114 cases, whereas we have 358. On a test whose total score may range theoretically from zero to 500, and empirically from 45 to 339, 114 cases are scarcely enough to establish reliable norms.

On Moss's social intelligence test, the discrepancy may be partly accounted for by the difference in administering the test, since our Ss were allowed to fill in the blanks at home.

On the Otis test of suggestibility a very marked difference in the central tendency exists between our group and Otis's standardization group. No explanation seems available, and a search for other reports on the test yielded nothing.

In an effort to discover the interrelations among the personality traits as measured by the tests, coefficients of correlation were computed for each test with every other. The *r* are presented in Table II. It will be noticed that there is some difference between *r* for the same traits in men and in women, with the single exception of that between suggestibility and introversion-extraversion.

In all but two cases, the r between the tests for men are higher than those for women. Also, most of the r are extremely low, except the one between ascendance-submission and introversion-extraversion for men (-0.51), and the one between emotionality and introversion-extraversion for women (0.31). It must be admitted that all these r prove little, since little is known positively about the validity of the tests. Thus whatever findings may result from our investigation will always be subject to this limitation.

TABLE II
INTERCORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE FIVE PERSONALITY TESTS

Test	(A-S)	(I-E)	(X-O)	(S-I)
I-E (men)	$-.51 \pm .03$			
I-E (women)	$-.19 \pm .05$			
X-O (men)	$-.17 \pm .05$	$.20 \pm .04$		
X-O (women)	$-.10 \pm .05$	$.31 \pm .05$		
Soc. Int. (men)	$.00 \pm .05$	$.11 \pm .05$	$-.21 \pm .04$	
Soc. Int. (women)	$.16 \pm .05$	$.01 \pm .05$	$-.06 \pm .05$	
Sug. (men)	$.15 \pm .05$	$-.10 \pm .05$	$-.20 \pm .04$	$.22 \pm .04$
Sug. (women)	$-.04 \pm .05$	$-.07 \pm .05$	$-.03 \pm .05$	$.13 \pm .05$

Early personal history. The questionnaire on early personal history consists of 48 questions, grouped into 5 parts according to the type of instructions necessary and to the chronological reference of the questions.

Part I asked for information as to the number of siblings in S 's family, his own position among them, and the number of step- or foster-brothers and sisters.

Part II asked for father's and mother's age at S 's birth; in case either parent were dead at the time of answering the questionnaire, the age of S at the time of the death; in case the parents were divorced, S 's age at that time; and the person with whom he lived afterwards; age at re-marriage of either parent; other adults living in the home before S was 6 yr. old; father's occupation; physical defects of S , their cause and the age at which they were acquired; time spent at kindergarten; age at beginning grade school; number of grades skipped or repeated; years needed to finish high school; number of teachers, and favorite and most disliked subjects in high school.

Part III referred to the period from birth to 7 yr. old. It asked whether the mother had been an active business or professional woman; how S had been disciplined by his father and by his mother; how much freedom his parents allowed him; what was the type of religious surroundings at the home; the condition of S 's health, the predominating type of play, opportunities for companionship with children of his own age, and for travel.

Part IV referred to the period between 7 and 12 yr. of age. It dealt with the extent to which S read for pleasure, participated in games at school, attended religious meetings, and had companionship with children of his own age; the

nature of his relationship with such other children (*e.g.* whether admired or teased); the extent to which he partook of social amusements; the source of his spending money, and the kind of school he attended.

Part V referred to the period from 12 to 16 yr. of age. It dealt with the extent to which *S* indulged in reading outside of school requirements, and the nature of such reading; the extent of his participation in school games, and in religious activities; the extent of his acquaintances and friends of the same sex, and of the opposite sex; the nature of his relationship with schoolmates or playmates; the types of amusement most indulged in, and the extent to which *S* worked for pay.

In tabulating answers to the questionnaire it was deemed necessary to group certain ones into convenient categories, or classes. For example, the occupation of the father is grouped under: (1) executive, (2) professional, (3) merchant-salesman, (4) clerk-labor, and (5) farmer; the ages of the parents at time of *S*'s birth are grouped into: (1) under 25, (2) 26 to 30, (3) 31 to 35, and (4) 36 or over; and so on for other questions. After thus grouping the answers to certain questions, the total number of answer-variables used in tabulating the results was reduced to 208. The tabulation was based wholly on frequency, and no effort was made to evaluate or rate any of the answers in any other respect. A frequency distribution of the answers by all the *S*s to the complete questionnaire is not presented here because the table would contain facts which are mainly of sociological and educational rather than of psychological value.

RESULTS

(1) *Personal history vs. ascendance-submission.* In considering the relationship between early personal history and personality traits our method was to trace from the differences in the personality traits to the corresponding differences in the early history variables. To do so we needed simply to differentiate the highest and lowest groups with reference to each personality trait, and to ascertain the corresponding group differences, if any, in the responses to the early personal history questionnaire. Thus, in showing the relationship between the early history and ascendance-submission, we selected the highest and lowest 20% of men on the A-S test, (repeating the process for women) and compared the frequencies of the responses of each group to each of the questions in the early personal history. Only those answer-variables whose total frequency was over 10 and for which one group was more than twice as large as the contrasted group were considered significant. Most promising for the differentiation of ascendance and submission are such facts in the early history as the following:

For ascendance.

- Reading omnivorously for pleasure (men: 23 A, 13 S; women: 21 A, 12 S);
- Participating in games at every opportunity (men: 18 A, 10 S; women: 18 A, 8 S);
- Being admired by associates (men: 24 A, 4 S; women: 18 A, 4 S).

For submission.

- Favoring languages in high school (men: 1 A, 9 S; women: 6 A, 16 S).
- Having limited friendship with own sex (men: 1 A, 10 S; women: 2 A, 11 S).

(2) *Personal history vs. introversion-extraversion.* Inasmuch as the same test of introversion-extraversion and the same questionnaire on early personal history

were used for both sexes, we are able here to consider the relationship between the trait and the history jointly as well as separately for the two sexes.

The variables which seem particularly promising for differentiating introversion-extraversion are the following:

For introversion.

- Having no, or just one or two, playmates (18 I, 3 E).
- Indulging in social amusements only when urged (15 I, 3 E).
- Practically never indulging in social amusements (10 I, 2 E).
- Participating in games only when asked, or practically never (25 I, 2 E).
- Having only a few intimate friends among own sex (20 I, 2 E).
- Having practically no friends among opposite sex (25 I, 6 E).
- Going to shows alone for recreation (23 I, 8 E).

For extraversion.

- Having many playmates (9 I, 25 E).
- Participating in games at every opportunity (10 I, 27 E).
- Being admired by associates (6 I, 15 E).

The variables of particular value in differentiating I-E in women are:

- "No consistent effort" in discipline by mother (10 I, 2 E).
- "Few kinds" of religious participation (17 I, 5 E).

The source of spending money in early boyhood seemed an important indicator in differentiating I-E in men, as the following results show:

- Worked at home for spending money (3 I, 10 E).
- Had a regular allowance (5 I, 12 E).
- Had an irregular allowance (21 I, 7 E).

(3) *Ascendance-submission vs. introversion-extraversion.* It will be recalled that by far the highest r in the table of intercorrelations among personality traits is that between ascendance-submission and introversion-extraversion for men, the r being -0.51 . It will be interesting, therefore, to see how many and what early history variables function in common between I-E and A-S in the direction that supports this correlation. They are as follows:

- father's age at S's birth, 36 years or over (14 submissives, 16 introverts, 5 ascendants, 7 extraverts);
- favoring languages in high school (9 submissives, 10 introverts, 1 ascendant, 3 extraverts);
- participation in games at every opportunity between 7-12 yr. of age (10 submissives, 12 introverts, 18 ascendants, 20 extraverts), between 12-16 (15 ascendants, 17 extraverts, 4 submissives, 6 introverts);
- admired by playmates in period from 7-12 yr. of age (18 ascendants, 16 extraverts, 8 submissives, 8 introverts), from 12-16 (24 ascendants, 18 extraverts, 4 submissives, 3 introverts);
- only a few intimates of own sex in period from 12-16 yr. of age (10 submissives, 14 introverts, 1 ascendant, 2 extraverts);
- no friends of opposite sex when in period from 12-16 yr. of age (16 submissives, 17 introverts, 7 ascendants, 4 extraverts);
- finishing high school in less than 3 years (7 ascendants, 5 extraverts, 0 submissives, 1 introvert);
- going to parties in period from 12-16 yr. of age (18 ascendants, 15 extraverts, 5 submissives, 6 introverts).

(4) *Personal history vs. social intelligence.* In considering the relationship between early personal history and social intelligence, as measured by the Moss

test, attention may be called to two points. First, it is questionable whether social intelligence is a personality trait in the same sense that the other four tests imply. Disregarding what an acceptable definition of social intelligence might be, it seems clear, from the content of the Moss test, that what it measures is a certain kind of knowledge or ability rather than a characteristic mode of behavior. Secondly, if the above statement is true, then a certain consistent relationship is to be expected between the test-score and early history, since social intelligence is a product of the social environment and training that constitute a large part of the early personal history. Thus any relation we may find between the history and the test-score would be no discovery, but can be considered merely as a confirmation of the effects of learning or habit formation. It is interesting, nevertheless, to list the early history variables on which those who scored high on Moss's social intelligence test seem to differ significantly from those who scored low.

Only 5 or 6 answer-variables seem to differentiate 'social intelligence' for both sexes in the same direction. It is difficult logically to account for this sex-difference. Furthermore, many of the answer-variables do not show as clean-cut differentiation as those obtained in the case of ascendance-submission or that of introversion-extraversion. The only variables to which especial attention need be directed are the following:

For men:

Fifteen of those having no friends among the opposite sex have a high score and 4 a low score in social intelligence; 11 of those studying art and music have a high score and 3 a low score in social intelligence; 7 of those participating in games at every opportunity tend to have a high score and 18 a low score.

For women:

Fifteen women who skipped 2 grades or more have a high score, 5 a low score; 15 who read omnivorously for pleasure have a high score and 4 a low score;

For both:

Seventeen men and women who never travelled have low scores, 7 high scores; and 17 men and women who played solitary games for recreation have high scores, and 4 have low scores.

(5) *Personal history vs. emotionality.* Only one answer-variable, namely "many kinds of religious participation," seems to be significant for emotionality as measured by the Pressey X-O Test. Twenty-four men whose religious atmosphere in childhood was conservative made a high emotionality score, and 12 a low one. Taking men and women together, 13 who "practically never" participated in religious activities during adolescence made high emotionality scores, while 22 made low ones.

(6) *Personal history vs. suggestibility.* Of the Ss, one or both of whose parents were under 25 yr. of age at the time of S's birth, 38 showed a high degree of suggestibility and 19 a low. The direction of this result is reversed for Ss born of older parents. Of the Ss who, between the ages of 7-12 yr., participated in games at every opportunity, 12 made high scores in suggestibility and 29 made low. Of those who, during the 7-12 yr. age-period, participated in games only when asked, 9 made high scores and 5 low; and of those who, during the 12-16 yr. age-period, participated only when asked, 17 made high scores and 7 low.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The major results of this study may be summarized as follows:

(1) The answer-variables most significant for ascendance are: reading omnivorously for pleasure, and participating in games at every opportunity. For submission: favoring languages in high school, reading very little for pleasure, and having limited companionship.

(2) Significant for introversion may be mentioned such items as having few playmates as a child, indulging in few social amusements, participating rarely in games at school, and having few or no friends. For extraversion: having many playmates, participating in games at every opportunity, and being admired by associates.

(3) Since the highest intercorrelation between the personality traits was found to be the one between ascendance-submission and introversion-extraversion for men, we noted what answer-variables were significant for differentiating both traits simultaneously. These were: father over 35 at *S*'s birth, *S*'s favoring languages in high school, participation in games at every opportunity, desire for admiration by playmates, lack of intimates of own sex and none of opposite sex during early adolescence, finishing high school in less than 3 years, and attendance at parties during early adolescence.

(4) In social intelligence, where one might expect *a priori* a high degree of relation between the early personal history and the test score, we actually obtained fewer significant answer-variables than in the cases of A-S or I-E.

(5) In studying the relationship between early personal history and emotionality, only one answer-variable applies to both sexes; those who participated in many kinds of religious activity in their adolescence are likely to score high on the Pressey test, and vice versa.

(6) As for suggestibility, especial attention is called to the question on parents' age, the answers to which showed that those *S*'s, both men and women, who were born to parents under 25 years of age had a tendency to be highly suggestible. Also, participation in games at every opportunity and in many kinds of religious activities seems connected with low suggestibility, whereas participating in games only when asked or urged seems to be connected with high suggestibility.

Within the limits of this study and with no claim to completeness or finality, our results seem to justify the following general conclusions:

(1) It appears possible by the method of group differences to discover in a person's early life significant facts in determining some of his later personality traits.

(2) The number and kind of such significant facts and the degree of their significance vary with the traits.

(3) The largest number and the most reliable of the significant facts in early personal history are found for predicting introversion-extraversion, the fewest and least reliable for emotionality.

(4) The results of this study have opened up a large number of specific problems suitable for further research concerning the relationship between certain facts in one's early personal history and certain of his personality traits.

